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THE GIBSON AND VAN ELTEN PICTURES.

THE water-colors shown by Mr. W. Hamilton Gibson at the American Art Galleries March 13th and following days covered a wide range of subjects. Mr. Gibson has been known mainly as a draughtsman of dainty landscapes and flower pieces for illustration; and in these he has displayed an accurate knowledge of plant and insect forms and a surpassingly delicate style of treatment. His exhibition was, therefore, a surprise, even to those who thought themselves well acquainted with his work; for a large proportion of the water-colors shown were broad studies of effects, evidently done directly from nature, without premeditation or addition. It was easy to distinguish these from his studio pictures, which are generally in a brown key of color and prettily composed, while the sketches referred to are mostly in a cool key, and are very impressionistic in appearance. Spring mists and blossoming apple-trees are what Mr. Gibson excels in painting outside of his previously known specialty of minute flower drawing; but some autumn studies and snow effects also deserve mention, for careful detail as well as generally truthfulness.

Mr. Van Elten's display of oil paintings, made at the same time and place, was less of a surprise, except as to quantity. The amount of work—good, thorough, deliberate work—which he has turned out is enormous. He works, however, in the old method, from sketches and partial studies in his studio, and as none of his preparatory work was shown, he did not offer as much variety of subject or of method as Mr. Gibson. Still, his streams, brooks and meadows, mountains and wood interiors, though all shown under the effects of settled summer weather, were far from appearing monotonous, notwithstanding their great number.

The Cabinet.

TALKS WITH EXPERTS.

III. — MR. HEROMICH SHUGIO ON JAPANESE KNIFE-HANDLES AND SWORD-PINS.

"AFTER sword-guards," said Mr. Shugio, "it is natural to speak of knife-handles and sword-pins, or, as we call them, kodsuka and kogui, as they are commonly found attached to the short swords—wagizashi and tanto—and sometimes, also, to long swords. Though less important than the guards, they are interesting to collectors, because of their artistic designs."

"I presume the best of them were made by the celebrated sword-guard makers?"

"No, that is not the case. Noted knife-handle makers sometimes made sword-guards though."

"Why is that?"

"In the first place, knives encased in the sword scabbard were not generally worn before 1550; while, as you already know, several of the most celebrated sword-guard makers flourished before that time. And, then, the making of a knife-handle, usually of soft metal, does not require the same kind of skill as sword-guard making."

"Why are knife-handles of soft metal?"

"Partly for artistic reasons, partly to save the scabbard from being scratched. Not being intended to ward off a blow, there was no reason to use tough and hard metal."

"They are seldom of iron, then?"

"Very seldom; and usually when they are of iron, the back is of shakudo, or silver, or other soft metal."

"How is it that the blades are not imported?"

"They are not ornamented. Collectors here want only the artistic part—that is, the handle. In Japan we

act rather differently, because the knife-blades were occasionally made by famous sword-makers."

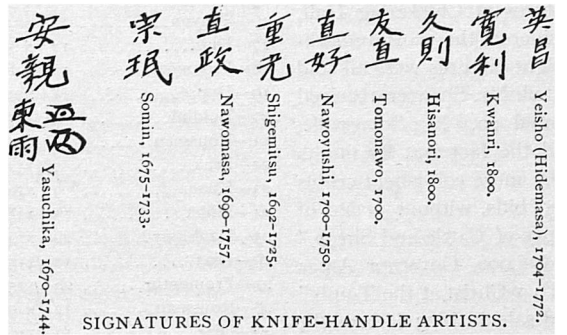
"Do you not think that Japanese taste must finally govern our collectors in Japanese art matters?"

"Perhaps so. Here is a sword complete, with all its mountings. The knife-blade is of good quality and is peculiar in that it has its back fashioned into a saw. A Japanese collector would not think of separating blade from handle or knife from sword in a case like this."

"The blade, I see, is shaped like a sword-blade."

"Yes, only not so curved; and it is bevelled at the edge and point."

"But those sword-pins, they are what some collectors



call bodkins and what others say were used as chopsticks, are they not?"

"Those that are all in one piece, usually the oldest, were used as bodkins, to pin the court cap to the hair, as American ladies fastened their hats last year. They were also used for scratching the head. Later, some time in the last century, that custom died out, or nearly, and then the sword-pins were divided to make chopsticks for use in camp or at a picnic. I am inclined to think, though, that none of the old bodkins were made over for this purpose, but that chopsticks were made in the same shape, only divided. I call both sorts sword-pins, as a general term."

"Some English and French writers maintain that the

looking at. It consists often of a bird or a spray of flowers thrown on without an enclosing line."

"The ornament of both knife-handles and sword-pins must commonly be either oblong or upright. Figures and horses are commonly used in the former case; landscapes in the latter, I observe."

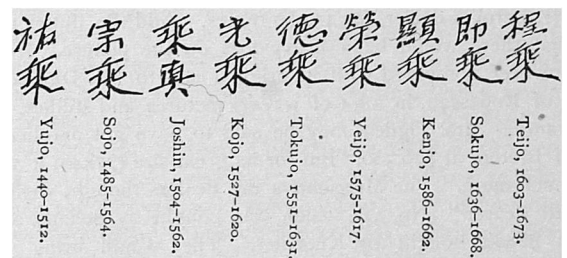
"In a large collection it is likely that you would be able to prove that to be right as to the majority of both sorts of designs. But you would find many examples of the contrary. Here is a group of jolly fat men in copper, arranged diagonally across the handle; and here are a number of horses in their sheds in black shakudo, on silver, disposed lengthwise on it; and here, again, is a group of apes, in gold, on shebutchi, sitting right in the middle. It is true that all of the illustrations you propose printing with our talk are oblong compositions, but there is a great deal of variety in them."

"As to makers' names?"

"I give you a list of the most noted. But let me call your attention to one or two points concerning names and marks on knife-handles which may easily escape the collector. The name of the maker is often not found on the back of the handle, where one would naturally look for it. It is then to be looked for on the butt that projects from the scabbard. Again, it is not uncommon to find two names—that of the maker and that of the artist who originated the design. And what persons not conversant with Japanese may take to be the mark of either of these is sometimes only a line of poetry or other inscription of the kind."

"Can any historical details be given about the best makers of knife-handles?"

"A great deal more than you could find room for. Goto Yujo was the first to work on them; and influenced by the artistic movement of his time, he followed, as a rule, the designs of the famous painter Kano Motonobu, who was one of his most intimate friends. He was the founder of the Goto family, and is considered as the father of this special branch of Japanese art. He died in 1512. The fourteen signatures which I give you are those of his descendants, each the head of the family and the most noted artist of his time."

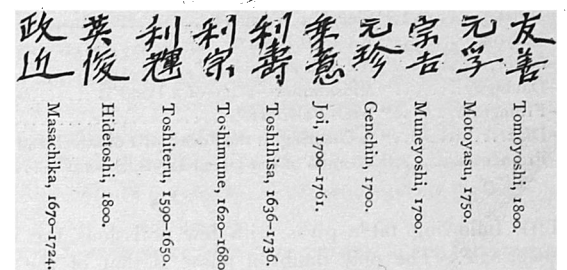


SIGNATURES OF JAPANESE KNIFE-HANDLE ARTISTS.

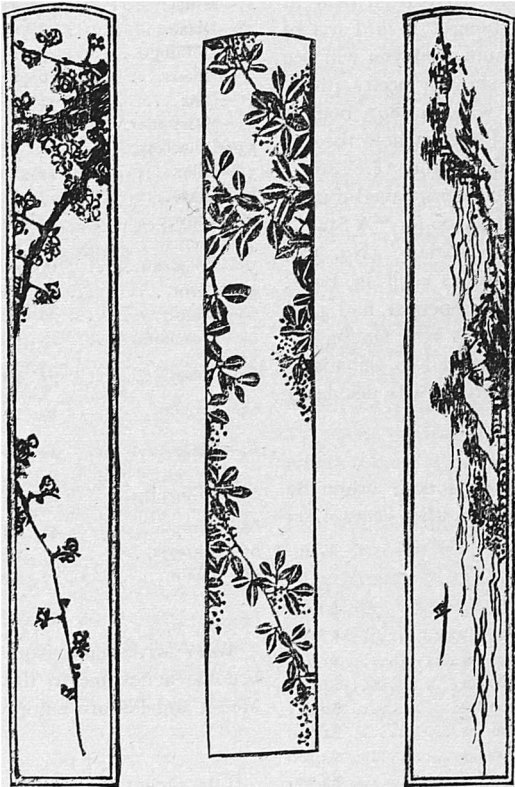
"But were there not other families almost as famous for excellence in the same branch of art?"

"Yes; but they did not produce so many masters as the Goto family. Still, Somin, of the Yok'oya family, is celebrated for the introduction of a particular kind of incised work, in which each line is cut by the knife from one side only. This we call katakiribori. Most of his works are from designs by Yei-icho, a famous painter of the latter part of the seventeenth century."

"Then there was Yasuchika, of the Nara family, whose works show the influence of the principles which he thus lays down in a letter to a friend: 'The artist,' he says, 'must be particular about the design for his work, must be thorough in execution, must always be pure in thought, and he must be satisfied to remain poor all his life.' This artist, Toshihisa and Jioi are known as the trio of the Nara family. Nagatsune of Kioto is also highly rated; and so is Hirata Hikoshiro, the first Japanese worker in cloisonné, which he learned of a Korean; so, too, are Konkan of the Iwamoto family, Kiyotōshi of the Tanaka family, Noriyoki of the Hamana family and Haruaki of the Kawano."



SIGNATURES OF JAPANESE KNIFE-HANDLE ARTISTS.



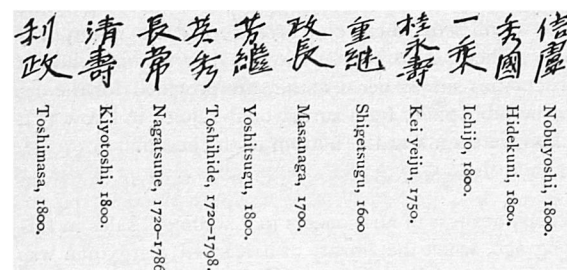
JAPANESE KNIFE-HANDLES.

principal use of these sword-pins was to mark the head of a slain enemy, just as our Indians used to take the scalp, in order to claim the honor of having killed him."

"Yes, I know the story. And something of the sort may have occurred once or twice; and there may be some legend about it. But it never was customary to do so. I can imagine a man taking up the head of a decapitated enemy and holding it by the sword-pin thrust through the hair; but as for a man's jabbing his own sword-pin into his enemy's head to mark it as his trophy, that may have been done once, perhaps, but it certainly was not the custom."

"The ornament must be confined to the broad upper part of the sword-pin, it would seem."

"Naturally. It would be as much out of place on the shank of a pin as on the blade of a knife. But it is not always enclosed in a cartouche, as on those that you are



SIGNATURES OF JAPANESE KNIFE-HANDLE ARTISTS.